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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000581

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [EAID](#) [SOCI](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#) [TU](#) [UNHCR](#)
SUBJECT: UNHCR TURKEY READY TO ENGAGE ON MAKHMOUR

REF: A. BAGHDAD 371
[B](#). BAGHDAD 358
[C](#). MAKHMOUR IWG MEMO 1/4/06

Classified By: Counselor for Political-Military Affairs Timothy A. Bett
s for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (S) UNHCR's Turkey office is ready to get to work on voluntary repatriation or local integration for residents of the Makhmour Camp in northern Iraq. However, the UNHCR-Turkey Representative pointed out obstacles to be overcome, such as accessing villages in southeast Turkey to which Makhmour residents might return, renegotiating the Tripartite Agreement from 2004, and security and funding for the overall mission. UNHCR emphasized that its main goal is durable solutions for refugees, not meeting Turkey's counterterrorism agenda. PKK violence in southeast Turkey will complicate this operation, but Turkey should have a strong incentive to make it work. End summary.

UNHCR Turkey Stands Ready...

[1](#)2. (S) We met Feb. 8 with Gesche Karrenbrock, UNHCR's Representative in Turkey, to discuss USG/UNHCR planning for durable solutions for the residents of Makhmour Refugee Camp in northern Iraq, with an eye to closing the camp in order to deprive the terrorist group PKK from using the base for logistical support (see ref c). Karrenbrock said that UNHCR stands ready to play its role toward completing this plan, but noted obstacles that need to be overcome.

...But Obstacles Remain

[1](#)3. (S) Karrenbrock noted that -- due to security concerns since the resumption of PKK violence in mid-2004 -- UNHCR has been unable to visit villages which many Makhmour residents fled in the mid-1990s. While GOT authorities in Ankara assured UNHCR that Turkish security forces would ensure their safety, in fact the security forces only escorted the UNHCR

workers to the outskirts of these villages, telling UNHCR they were on their own after that. The UNHCR workers, concerned for their safety, did not proceed further. Thus UNHCR is currently unable to provide the Makhmour residents a fair assessment of the situation in their home village. The worsening security situation in the southeast will only make UNHCR's efforts to assess these villages more difficult, absent a more concrete guarantee of security from the GOT. Karrenbrock further noted that UNHCR has imperfect information on the home villages of many residents; it only has the village of birth of the residents, which may not be the same in many cases as the village they abandoned in the 1990s.

Resurrect the Tripartite Agreement

¶4. (S) Karrenbrock recommended that UNHCR, the GOT, and GOI (after it forms) use the Tripartite Agreement negotiated in 2003-04 as the basis for reaching agreement on Makhmour, with the understanding that all three sides may wish to reopen certain provisions for discussion. She suggested that the USG role might be somewhat more limited this time given the sovereign nature of the Iraqi government. (COMMENT: We believe Turkey will want the USG to have some role in these negotiations. END COMMENT) Given the shortness of time and the fact the GOI formation may take some time, she expressed an interest in approaching the GOT -- at least informally -- as soon as possible to look into reviving the Tripartite Agreement.

Concerns About the GOT Agenda

ANKARA 00000581 002 OF 002

¶5. (S) Karrenbrock expressed concern that the Turkish MFA has shifted responsibility for the Makhmour issue from the directorate responsible for international organizations to the Security Affairs Directorate (roughly our S/CT equivalent). She emphasized that the GOT's main objective is to close Makhmour Camp, while UNHCR's main objective is to find durable solutions for Turkish refugees in Iraq. She worried that the Turkish MFA, by moving this portfolio, was placing the wrong emphasis on tough counterterrorism measures as opposed to seeking ways to welcome back refugees to Turkey. UNHCR must be seen as an impartial player, not as a counterterrorism tool of the GOT. Otherwise, UNHCR workers in Makhmour could be targeted by the PKK. We responded that the USG shares both objectives, and sees finding durable solutions as a valuable goal, while closure of the camp also serves to counter terrorism, a key objective. We encouraged Karrenbrock to be clear about her mission with all sides.

Security and Funding Issues

¶6. (S) Karrenbrock asked for clarification on who will provide security in and around Makhmour to ensure the PKK cannot intimidate either camp residents or UNHCR workers. We replied that we did not know much about specifics, but that this was a topic on the agenda for the USG/UNHCR meeting in Amman on Feb. 22.

¶7. (S) Finally, Karrenbrock asked if the USG was considering providing funding to assist UNHCR with this mission. Again, we surmised this would be a topic for the Amman meeting later this month.

Comment: We Can Work It Out

¶8. (S) Karrenbrock was in her position when the original Tripartite Agreement on Makhmour was negotiated in 2003-04, and recalled the GOT negotiators were quite tough. She wondered what the GOT's attitude will be in the current

climate toward assuring a safe and unharassed return for Makhmour's residents. At the time of the negotiations, PKK violence in Turkey was almost nil. In the intervening two years, however, the situation in the southeast has become more dangerous, which may lead the GOT to treat the returnees (many of them may be sympathetic to the PKK) harshly. However, renewed PKK violence only increases the GOT's desire to deprive the PKK of the use of Makhmour. Additionally, both the USG and GOT will see the camp's closure as a deliverable in our mutual cooperation against the PKK. Thus the GOT has an incentive to make the necessary assurances to UNHCR. END COMMENT.

WILSON